

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION
PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
LABOR ARCHIVES OF WASHINGTON
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
MIKE MARINO OF ILWU LOCAL 500, PCPA

INTERVIEWEE: MIKE MARINO

INTERVIEWERS: HARVEY SCHWARTZ

SUBJECTS: ITALIANS IN CANADA DURING WORLD WAR II; NICARAGUAN CIVIL WAR;
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[00:00:00] **HARVEY SCHWARTZ:** This is Harvey Schwartz, we're in Vancouver, British Columbia as part of the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association Oral History Project. Today is the fourteenth of September, 2014, I'm with Mike Marino and Mike's in the Canadian area. Can you tell me where you were born and when you were born?

[00:00:31] **MIKE MARINO:** I was born here in Vancouver, B.C. on Oct 27, 1934. I'm 79 until next month, then I'll be 80. [smiles]

[00:00:43] **HARVEY:** Well, congratulations, I think. [both laugh] Do you know what countries your parents came from?

[00:00:51] **MIKE:** My parents both came from Italy. My dad came from Sicily, he was born in 1890 and he left Sicily in 1905, came in through Ellis Island, and lived in the United States for quite a few years. He worked on the railway and was a miner. He ended up—just after the First World War—he came to Canada.

[00:01:25] **HARVEY:** How come?

[00:01:27] **MIKE:** I don't know, he got up here, and I remember him saying—I was only about 12 years old when he died. But I remember him saying and talking to people that the labor laws, and compensation, and different things in Canada at that time were better than in the U.S. He died—he was only 56 years old—a hard rock miner and full of dust in his lungs [gestures at chest], silicosis you know—and he got a pension, my mom got a pension for years and that was life in those days—there wasn't a lot of safety things around—you worked, more or less, until you dropped I guess.

[00:02:26] **HARVEY:** Did he say why the labor laws and the labor scene here was better than in the U.S.?

[00:02:31] **MIKE:** Well, I don't know labor laws so much—I remember them talking—he was off on pension for many years. It seemed to me that it's something we have in Canada that they didn't have in the U.S.

[00:02:46] **HARVEY:** What kind of pension set up was it, was it from a union, or from some other entity?

[00:02:51] **MIKE:** He was a member of Mine-Mill [International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers], well my uncle who was younger than him was a member of Mine-Mill for many years, so I don't know if he was in Mine-Mill at the time because I don't even know if they were organized that much prior to the war and during the war, I think that happened more after the war.

[00:03:13] **HARVEY:** This is the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers union? Was your dad active in the union?

[00:03:19] **MIKE:** No, no he wasn't. He wasn't active. My uncle, he was a member for years. I've got his old books on Mine-Mill and he was a union supporter, but he was never active in the union.

[00:03:38] **HARVEY:** Well, you're a young fellow, what's it like growing up here for you when you're a real young guy? Before your dad passed away? And right after?

[00:03:47] **MIKE:** Well, you know, I was born in 1934. My dad never actually worked too many years prior to him being off on pension. My mother worked as a chambermaid and housekeeper in hotels. I don't know—it just seemed—we had enough food, I never felt like we were poor. We weren't rich by any means. We never had a car, we took the street cars going here and there, but we always had enough. My dad had a big garden and so we got by very well.

[00:04:28] **HARVEY:** Yes. Any difficulty being Italian or having an Italian background?

[00:04:37] **MIKE:** During the war, they put a lot of Italians in camps during the war. It wasn't as harsh as what they did to the Japanese. They took everything away from them, especially here on the coast there were a lot of fishermen and they lost their boats, lost their homes, they lost everything. Whereas in Canada—

[00:05:05] **HARVEY:** You're talking about the Japanese experience here? Japanese-Canadian?

[00:05:11] **MIKE:** [nods] Japanese-Canadians—actually the same in the United States--

[00:05:15] **HARVEY:** Yes, very similar. But the Italians were—

[00:05:20] **MIKE:** The Italians were treated differently if you were a member of any of the fascist organizations

prior to the war. Especially if you were active, well then you were put in a camp, but you never lost your home. Your family weren't moved, so we were treated differently. Mainly because we were white. It was the same in the United States at that time. You know the Oriental people in Canada never got to vote until 1948 and a lot of them joined the army during the War and fought and yet they weren't citizens—well they were in the sense, I guess partially. But they didn't have the vote until 1948.

My wife's uncle, he was put in a camp during the war. They had these ex-soldiers societies and they were pro fascist, there's no doubt about it. So he was put in a camp. While he was in the camp during the war, his two sons were in the Air Force fighting in Europe [smiles]—so, it was a strange situation, but—[shrugs] You know we think that's terrible now, what happened, especially with the Japanese [shakes head] and that, but that was the times. I mean people were so racist in those times and that was the result of it. Even people we might admire as labor leaders, it was just as bad there—they didn't want Orientals or people maybe who weren't Anglo in certain areas.

[00:07:25] **HARVEY:** You're aware that Louis Goldblatt [former ILWU secretary-treasurer] spoke against the camps in the United States?

[00:07:29] **MIKE:** Yes.

[00:07:29] **HARVEY:** He testified. Just thought to make sure you knew.

[00:07:32] **MIKE:** Yes, I was aware of that. There were people here [Vancouver, B.C.] who spoke against that. They weren't too popular at the time. [smiles]

[00:07:38] **HARVEY:** Right, right. Tell me a little about your youth and schooling, you know where you went to school? What early jobs you might have had?

[00:07:46] **MIKE:** Well, actually, the first job I had, my dad got it for me when we were out in the summer holidays. I guess I was 12 years old, it was the year he died in the Fall. He got me a job shining shoes. There were a lot of young kids in those days, we had on Hastings Street here in Vancouver—Hastings Street and down from Main. There was a lot of shoe shine [boys] . And that was a good area of town, it was a good part of town. People when they went out, they used to have their shoes shined. And there were a lot—I was see these kids getting— well, I wanted to make a buck. Even though I was 12, I wanted—you know. So he said, "OK." So we got this guy he knew that he'd worked in the mines, and he had retired from the mines and he had a shoe shine stand, so he [Mike's father] got me a job there. I got a dollar a day in tips. Well, my dad died in '46 so I guess it was that same year probably.

[00:08:56] **HARVEY:** What jobs did you have subsequent to that?

[00:08:59] **MIKE:** Actually, when I was 15 years old, I wasn't too interested in school. I passed, I did my grades, but I wasn't too interested. So I got a job on a ship when I was 15 years old as a mess boy, on an old ship built in Canada during the War. We made a trip over to England, over to London, and then we went back to the East Coast of Canada, loaded newsprint and brought it around to San Diego [California] and San Pedro [California] . I was 16 years old [while] on my way home. That was my first trip to sea, and I loved it and I sailed pretty steady for the next 13 years, I guess.

[00:09:52] **HARVEY:** Really?

[00:09:52] **MIKE:** Yes, Canada still had some merchant ships left. They had a large fleet during the war.

[00:10:01] **HARVEY:** Was this first vessel a Liberty ship or a Victory ship? [types of cargo ships]

[00:10:04] **MIKE:** Well, it was a Liberty ship with the same hull as an American Liberty ship, but the housework was different. As far as the engines and the winches, everything was the same. The Americans, what they did was they used the same plant—the plant where these ships—it was a plant in England in the twenties and so they had the bridge area separate, they had two hatches forward of the bridge, and they had hatch in the mid-ship, and then the engineer's quarters and then the back half of the crew. The Americans, what they did when they built the Liberty ships was combine all of that superstructure into one.

It was better for the crews. Because as a mess boy, I would have to go to the galley, I'd have to go from back aft—and we had what they called “dixies”—round containers like that [gestures] and we'd have them stacked up on a tray. I'd have to carry these trays back aft for the crew. Well, most of the trips are Vancouver going to England, or South Africa, or wherever, we always had deck loads of lumber. So we had to climb on top of the deck load of lumber, and walk along the catwalk on deck, and then down some steps to go to the galley and then carry it back and then, you know, serve the crew.

On those ships, you know those old ships they were built in Canada, and people who manned them during the war, they did a lot to improve the lot of seamen. One thing we had, our quarters were clean, they had to be painted every year and it was stenciled on the bulkhead when we painted, that it was actually done. They had the one pot system for food. That meant that everyone ate the same from the captain to the mess boy. There were only two things on the menu, take it or leave it, more or less. And they fed [us] not too badly.

Living on those ships, for me, was an adventure. I started when I was 15 years old, ‘Hey, I’m going England. I’m going to South Africa. I’m going to Australia.’ You know? I did all these trips and in those days nobody traveled much, it wasn’t like today where kids graduate from high school, “Oh we’re going to Hawaii, we’re going to Mexico,” wherever, but not in those days. It was more than adventure to me, it was an education because a lot of the people I sailed with, they were real solid union people. So I guess that’s how I got involved in the union stuff.

[00:13:31] **HARVEY:** Were you in the Marine Cooks and Stewards? [National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards]

[00:13:34] **MIKE:** No, I was in the West Coast Seamen’s Union. That was the western division of the Canadian Seamen’s Union [CSU]. In 1949, they went on strike and the East Coast companies refused to sign the contract. The West Coast companies did. They were all part of the CSU. So the East Coast companies were tied up, the West Coast companies kept sailing. That was the agreement between the union, you keep going, they signed the contract, and that would help finance the strike.

So when the union was broken in ‘49, the government actually brought in the Seafarers’ International Union [Seafarers International Union of North America] from the United States, and they did the scabbing. A fellow by the name of Hal Banks came up here with the support of the liberal government at the time—so called liberal, they weren’t liberal at all—and they broke the union. The fact that the West Coast ships were still operating, they changed their name to the West Coast Seamen’s Union. So the strike was over in the fall of ‘49, and I started sailing in June. Actually, I started sailing a week before the Korean War. June of 1950.

They were wonderful guys to sail with. They treated you—I was just a kid—these were guys mainly 10 years older than me, five years older, but guys who sailed during the war. They had been told during the war that ‘Canada’s going to keep a merchant fleet. We’re going to do something for you guys after the war and everything.’ But it was all bullshit. The first chance they got to get rid of those ships. . . [shakes head] One of the reasons for the strike was to try to keep the fleet. They had everyone against them; they had more support

outside Canada than in Canada. They tied up ships all over the world, tied them up in the UK, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, and they got tremendous support from a lot of people, outside of Canada. But the labor movement, they didn't support the strike. It was the times of red-baiting [harassing on suspicion of communist sympathies], anyone who was too strong of a union man must be a communist, you know. And that was the times, and it was pretty tough on those guys. They sailed during the War a lot of them. I sailed with guys who had been torpedoed, who had spent time in the German camps during the war, and after they went back to sea—that was their life. They did expect something, but they didn't get it.

[00:17:06] **HARVEY:** Had the union had a left progressive?

[00:17:08] **MIKE:** Yes, they were a left-wing union, but there was a lot of left-wing unions in those days. It wasn't that they wanted to overthrow the government, they just wanted rights as Canadians. They wanted to live like Canadians, that was their only fault. They said, "Hey, we want to live on Canadian ships like Canadians." Well, the ship owner thinks, "Why should we keep you on the ship?" so they, like they did in the United States, they transferred all kinds of these ships. In the United States they built about 2,700 Liberty ships alone.

Well, with those ships in the United States and Canada, they would put foreign crews on them, and I remember a few years ago, the ITF, the International Transport Federation, they had a program on to inspect ships. So they asked us if we would help, us pensioners, so I guess this was about five or six years ago, so we went aboard those ships. There would be about five of us in a group, and we'd hit every ship that was in port at the time and we'd talk to the crew.

As I said, I started sailing in 1950, and five or six years ago—most of the people lived worst five or six years ago, let's say 1999 or 200—pardon me, I'm 10 years behind—we lived better in 1950 on Canadian ships than 90 percent of seamen at that time [approx. 2008/2009]; it was unbelievable. Some of the things that were going on in those ships. [wrinkles nose] You know, the captain had everything. The captain and most of the officers, they ate very well, they had their own food—nothing like what the crew got. Some of the crews on one ship couldn't sleep in their quarters, there were so many bed bugs, and lice. [grimaces] It was terrible. They had to sleep in the mess room on the floor, up on the deck.

Yet these Canadian seamen, all they expected, "We want to live like Canadians." But that wasn't in the cards, because they had all these other people they could hire, through no fault of their own, coming from other countries, and so that's how they got rid of the fleet. There's no Canadian ships today, no Canadian deep sea ships, there's ships on the Great Lakes, but other than that not much.

[00:20:16] **HARVEY:** The employers will always move things around; it's part of what they do. Were there any more beefs and stuff that you recall between 1950 and the next 13 years? Were there any strike actions you were involved in? What were you doing in the union? Were you active in the union? You were still pretty young.

[00:20:36] **MIKE:** Yes, I was. Well, on the ships they were well organized, they had a delegate for the deck crew, a delegate for the "black gang" they called it—the guys down below, the firemen and boilers, the delegate for the stewards' department, and then the ship's delegate. So we had regular meetings. Any beefs that came up we settled it, they had trials so if a guy did something we thought was wrong. It was a good education on how working people can actually rule themselves. I think for me, it was wonderful, those times, being a kid.

But I have to say that the seamen themselves, a lot of the guys I sailed with, they were very moral people. I remember I was on a ship, we took a load of lumber down to South Africa, this was 1952, we were going up the coast after unloading all this lumber in South Africa. We went up to, it was called at that time, British West Africa on the Gold Coast. It's now called Ghana; this was before they got their independence from Britain. We got in there and the captain and the officers were not bad guys at all, and they would allow you to hire somebody

to work for you. You'd hire a guy, you know the natives, and they'd come aboard the ship. 'Can we work for you?' They [the officers] said to me, "You hire a guy, you pay them what you're making." You could hire these guys for a couple of shillings a day. I was getting about \$140-\$145 a month, it worked out to just about five dollars a day, about four-something. So I hired a guy to work for me, and I paid him what I [would have earned]. Well, he was shocked that we would do this. [laughs] I have to laugh at times when I think about the guys—you know, they're not really educated people, they're just seamen. But they had that sense of 'you don't take advantage of another working man.'

[00:23:36] **HARVEY:** That's nice, yes. No wonder you like it.

[00:23:41] **MIKE:** Well, you know, those are the things that stay with you when you're a kid, you know?

[00:23:50] **HARVEY:** It's around 1963, and you left, you stopped going to sea?

[00:23:55] **MIKE:** Yes, well actually what happened to me, I was sailing deep sea, then I ended up sailing on the coast because the ships were gone, you know. So I was sailing on the coast and a guy said to me, "Let's go back East." You see this history of seamen in deep sea is that in 1956 the SIU, the Seafarers International Union, they had a control of some of the ships on the West Coast. These are coastal ships, and us on the West Coast Seamen's Union, had control of the rest of them. Actually, we had organized most of the towboat companies. So in 1956, the year the AFL [American Federation of Labor] and the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] merged [*sic*], and we were an independent union because we'd been, the Canadian Seamen's Union, had been expelled from the Trades and Labour Council [*sic*] of Canada, which was a branch actually, of the AFL, and they were expelled. So we were on our own.

So in 1956 when the AFL and CIO merged [*sic*], the trades and labor council, which was a part of the AFL, and the Canadian Congress of Labour was affiliated with CIO, and so they formed the Canadian Labour Congress [CLC]. We were on the outside looking in. So our officers said, "We have to do something here." And I understand, I don't know if it's for a fact, they tried to get a charter with the ILWU and they couldn't get it for whatever reason. So they decided we should merge with the SIU, after they had broken the union. I tell you there were a lot of hard feelings, because a lot of the guys who'd gone through the '49 strike, East Coast guys who ended up on the West Coast, on an East Coast registered ship, they lost their jobs so they ended up sailing on the West Coast ships. And it was a tough thing to accept. They couldn't accept the fact after scabbing on them a few years earlier, that they're going to now merge with the SIU. But the merger went through.

So I was sailing on the coast in '56 and after this I got a job on a SIU ship, actually it was the Clifford J. Rogers, the first container ship built in the world, built as a container ship. Now SeaLand had built an American ship and they had started hauling containers from East Coast of the United States to the West Coast. But this ship was built specifically to haul containers. There were no gantries on them, there was standing gear and the containers were only, I think they were, eight feet by eight feet, small boxes. We used to run from Skagway [Alaska], or from Vancouver up to Skagway, and so some of the guys said, "Let's go east," because with this merger with the SIU, the Great Lakes had SIU seamen, and on the East Coast they had a lot of ships. Well, one company especially Canadian National Steamships, they used to, they had eight or ten ships running down all in the West Indies. So a guy said 'Let's go back East.' It was a funny thing, there was about three of us paid off the ship. This guy had an old Studebaker and he says, "Ok, come on this." So he picked me up at home and he drove so long. Well, I said I don't drive. And the other guy said, "I don't drive either." This older guy, he got a little upset. He had to drive all the way back East.

He wasn't too happy about that, but we got back there and sailed on the Lakes for a while and then these Canadian ships were sold to Cuba and so the SIU in Halifax struck them. They wanted seamen to go down to Halifax from Montreal to picket these ships. I was hanging around Montreal, I'd just gotten paid off this ship, so

I said “Sure, OK, I’ll go.” A bunch of us went down there and picketed for a while. You know, they paid our hotel room, they paid for our food and everything else, and then they just called it off, I guess, for whatever reason. Then they said, “Ok, all you guys that came down we’re going to make sure that you get a job.”

So we all got a job on a cable ship and I was on that ship for about 13 months, or so. We used to do all the cable repairs off the East Coast of Canada and run over to the Azores, Greenland. We laid the line for the American Air Force, what they called at that time was called the Strategic Air Command and they had a base in Greenland—Thule, Greenland, and so we went up and laid the line from Baffin Island [Canadian Territory of Nunavut] and ran up there. So that was a good job, I enjoyed it. I’d been on the East Coast about two-and-a-half years between sailing on the lakes and being on that ship. Then the port agent came down to me, came down to the ship and said “Hey Mike, I’m sorry, but I got a list of names here from the West Coast and I have to pull you off the ship.” And I said, “Why’s that?” And he said, “Well, there’s a problem on the West Coast and I got this list of names.” So he said “Why don’t you phone Hal Banks in Montreal?” I phoned him at the time, but he wouldn’t take my call. The port agent was an alright of a guy so he said, “You can use the hall if you like, but you should really go back on the West Coast and find out what’s going on.”

So I phoned out here and I got the message about what happened in 1959 was that the National Association of Marine Engineers in Canada, they had a contract with a company, a coastwise company called Northland Navigation. And the SIU had a contract for the crew. Well the engineers went on strike and the SIU said “We’ll supply engineers.” They were going to scab on the engineers. So, longshore, they said, “We’re going to support the engineers,” which they did. The SIU said, “Well, we’ll supply longshoremen also.” So what they did was in their union hall they have a board where you register where you want to go to work and you have a card up there, so they take your card, and they’ll call the job and take the cards. So they’d take your card out and say, “Ok, you’re going down longshoring at Northland Navigation,” and they [the longshoremen] said, “We’re not going to scab.”

So what happened, a lot of our guys had gone in through the merger [CSU merger with SIU] , the majority of them, they refused to scab. They went down and supported the engineers on the picket line, so they all got expelled from the SIU.

I guess what they [SIU] did, I’d been on the East Coast two-and-a-half years, they just took a list of all us guys that came in through the merger and said, “They all must be communist, or something, because they refuse to scab.” So they just blacklisted all of us, they put us on the DNS list they called it, the Do Not Ship list, and so that’s what happened. No trial. I had a book in the SIU, when we merged, it was book for book, “All past differences are forgotten, we’re all together in one union in Canada again,” [sighs] No, no. No trial, nothing.

So I came back to the West Coast, and I automatically—in the meantime, the people who refused to scab, had gotten a charter from the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees [CBRE] so they got a charter. They were taking jurisdictions and contracts away from the SIU. So by the time I got back out here, because I got off that ship in Halifax, I went on a non-union cable ship for a couple of months. By the time I got back out here the CBRE, at that time, had quite a few jurisdictions. They just took me right in, anyone who was expelled was taken right in the union.

[00:34:30] **HARVEY:** What was the name again? The new group, or the new charter?

[00:34:36] **MIKE:** Well, it was at that time called the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, and then they changed their name to the Canadian Brotherhood of Transport Workers, CBRT [Canadian Brotherhood of Railway, Transport, and General Workers]. The Local 400, I can’t remember what year it was that Local 400 of the CBRT merged with the ILWU, and they’ve been part of the longshore now for years.

[00:35:11] **HARVEY:** Well, if you were 13 years, that would be around '63? Does that sound close?

[00:35:12] **MIKE:** That's right. I paid off the ship. My first son was born in September of '62, and I was sailing on the coast. It wasn't the same as deep sea. I was married then, and I didn't really like going out of town that much.

So in that year, '63, the grain crop in Russia failed and they had to—they bought tons and tons of grain and sacked flour from Canada. Tons and tons of it. A lot of it was shipped out. They would come over in these old American Liberty ships that were spotless. They had these ships, they were just spotlessly clean. We would load them up with flour, 50 kilo bags of flour.

This was towards the end of '63, so I thought, 'If I don't get off these ships, I'm going to be stuck on them the rest of my life.' And I wanted to get ashore, because working as a coastwise seamen, you're just a traveling longshoremen because you do most of the work in all the ports. They were smaller ships, you know. So I went down to the [ILWU] hall at the end of '63 and I got hired in January of 1964 and stayed there right until I retired in 1999.

[00:36:53] **HARVEY:** So it's 1964?

[00:36:55] **MIKE:** January '64 I started longshoring.

[00:36:59] **HARVEY:** What kind of work did you do, was this Local 500?

[00:37:01] **MIKE:** It was 501 at the time, prior to the merger.

[00:37:05] **HARVEY:** Prior to the merger. You were mostly working grain?

[00:37:14] **MIKE:** No, no, most of the time we were just laboring, really. And a lot of it—they had all this flour coming in from the mills back east from the prairies or wherever so we'd have to unload railcars of flour, or we'd have to go down below and work stowing stacking sacks of flour and it was from the bottom up of the ship to the top, so you'd be a few weeks loading her. They didn't have cranes, they had standing gear, so they'd set the derricks so you'd work a certain part of the hatch and maybe top up a bit. You'd have to carry 50 kilo bags all day long, so that was the majority of the work, or lumber.

They shipped a lot of lumber. At that time there was still a lot of what they called "hand stowed lumber." They'd load the ships—they'd send down a sling-load of random length lumber and you'd have to pick it up and stow each piece by hand. Some of those ships, like a Liberty ship would take four weeks—a month, to load all those. They'd load a certain amount here, and then go to the island, and the United States, and they'd load up all kinds of little ports. And that's the work we did. Vancouver, a lot of lumber after it was unitized and they had forklifts down below with standard lengths—so that was our work.

[00:38:53] **HARVEY:** Were you there for the transition from hand-done to jitney loading?

[00:38:56] **MIKE:** No, actually, when I got in the union they needed winch drivers. So what happened when we were sworn into the union, we had a rule you had to join a gang, and had to work down below in a gang for six months, probation. Then you could leave and could go to a hall and just—your time was done, you were a full member and away you go. [waves hands]

So they were short of topside, they were short of winch drivers. Well, I had operated winches when I was a seaman on the coast. So they said if anyone trains and passes, they don't have to stay in a gang—or you don't

have to stay the six months in a gang.

So I said “Ok.” I trained and I passed because I had driven winches quite a bit on the coast, but then after that they train you to drive all machinery, like the ship cranes and the gargantuan cranes. So I was fortunate in that sense. I did most of my work when I got in the union, operating machinery; mainly cranes and winches. I didn’t have a forklift or radio or anything like that. I didn’t like to work on bulk sites, I liked to work on ships, so that’s mainly what I did.

[00:40:35] **HARVEY:** When you come in in 1964, the union had been a company union up until 1944, and then things got better with the 1958 strike over pensions, but you—was there still tension over the guys who had scabbed in 1935? [Workers] who had come into the union, come back into the union after the 1935 strike, had worked and then other guys didn’t? Can you outline all that? I know you know something about that.

[00:41:07] **MIKE:** Yes. I remember even when I started in 1964, there were still people who had scabbed in 1935, to break the union. They were still working on the waterfront, and there was a little bit of tension. I guess after a while people kind of let it go, but there were still people who were like “I don’t want nothing to do with that guy. He scabbed in 1935.” [waves hand as though pushing away] They don’t forget.

[00:41:39] **HARVEY:** Do you remember a specific story around that?

[00:41:48] **MIKE:** Well some of them--they were nice enough guys to work with we were young and they were a lot older so. . . You know, I remember one guy, he would come down—let’s say I was working on the winches on the day shift and I’d have to work ‘til five o’clock and he would come down around three o’clock and say “Go ahead Mike, you go home.” It was just his way—and he admitted, he said, “Yeah, I scabbed,”—it was—[shakes head, gestures]. I mean they’re all gone now, naturally. There was a little bit of tension, but not much, because after the union was broken here in ‘35, scabs got control of the waterfront, but then they realized, “Hey, we need a union here.” [smiles] So they formed another union.

I think the biggest difference when we talk about the United States and Canada is on the West Coast in 1934, the [United States] longshoremen went on strike, and they want a six-hour day, they want a coastwide agreement, they did wonderful. Well, a year later in Canada, when they went on strike, they broke the union, and they never recovered until after the war. And they never really got organized until after the war. That’s when the organizing was done. So we have a different history.

[00:43:38] **HARVEY:** Yes.

[00:43:39] **MIKE:** And we still don’t—in the Port of Vancouver, we still do not control the hiring hall. We have a hiring hall—it’s a company-owned hall. Our business agent oversees the dispatch, but the dispatchers are company employees.

[00:43:58] **HARVEY:** The dispatchers are company employees?

[00:44:01] **MIKE:** Yes, the union organized them a couple of times, but somehow the labor board or the powers that be would not allow them to be certified.

[00:44:15] **HARVEY:** What kind of influence do the business agents have? Do they have any power over these guys?

[00:44:22] **MIKE:** Well, yes, they do, they have to make sure there’s no favoritism, that the dispatch is run properly. We have a board where guys put their card in there and—so they [the union business agent] make sure

it's being called out in order. They oversee the dispatch, but they don't control it.

[00:44:46] **HARVEY:** Is this in the contract that they oversee it?

[00:44:51] **MIKE:** I haven't seen it in the contract, to be honest with you, but it's just the way it is. You know, I haven't seen it in the contract, I haven't seen it in writing, but that's the way it works.

[00:45:03] **HARVEY:** And this is all the way from the time you were in in 1964?

[00:45:07] **MIKE:** Well, it's still today.

[00:45:08] **HARVEY:** I know, but I mean the structure—

[00:45:10] **MIKE:** Oh well, see—I forget what year amalgamation was. Because there was more than the deep sea local in Vancouver. There were half a dozen locals and those locals, they ran their own dispatch, the other locals, like the coastwise local, they ran their own dispatch. They had their own dispatchers and they had a warehouse local and they ran their own dispatch. They had a grain liners local; they used to get the ships read for loading grain—they ran their own dispatch. It was just the deep sea longshoremen in Local 501 who didn't have that control.

[00:45:51] **HARVEY:** So it was mixed.

[00:45:52] **MIKE:** When the locals merged, the dispatch was combined, and they took over all the dispatch, the employer. It was a central dispatch.

[00:46:11] **HARVEY:** Why did we give that up? Why did we give up having a union dispatcher?

[00:46:16] **MIKE:** Well, they didn't give it up in the 501, because I don't believe they ever had a union dispatcher.

[00:46:21] **HARVEY:** But why did the other locals give it up?

[00:46:24] **MIKE:** Well, I don't know how amalgamation would work otherwise. They wanted a master contract because prior to amalgamation there were separate contracts for each local, separate pension plans for—so you know, they wanted amalgamation and they wanted one plan for everyone. So I guess that was just how it happened. I couldn't say why they would give that up, whether they felt that the fact that the business agents policing the dispatch would be adequate. I don't know. But's what happened.

[00:47:04] **HARVEY:** Do you think they've been adequate?

[00:47:09] **MIKE:** Yes. I think that lately that we've elected a couple of people—they're not really dispatchers—but to enable the dispatch requirements to be filled. They are elected by our people and they contact our guys once they find out how much help is needed the next day. They try to make sure that they'll help get these people to go to the hall in the morning, for example. They may call you up, "Are you going to be available tomorrow?" Try to get the dispatch filled, but they're not actually dispatch.

[00:48:15] **HARVEY:** Is there a "lowman out" system of some kind? That is to say that the guy with the fewest hours is the first guy dispatched, to equalize the work. Do they make the work rotational?

[00:48:24] **MIKE:** Well the way they dispatch, it's a rotationary dispatch. Everybody plugs in. They're all on a board [gestures downward in a line], and wherever the work ends one day, that's where it'll start at the next dispatch. Although they have different dispatch buttons for different shifts. So the day button stops, on number

40, for example, well it'll start at 41 the next day. [indicates a circular shape] So it's a rotationary dispatch.

[00:49:00] **HARVEY:** Right. By rotations do you mean like 40, 41, 42, or guys with fewer hours than the other guys?

[00:49:07] **MIKE:** No, no hours don't matter.

[00:49:08] **HARVEY:** They don't do it by hours.

[00:49:09] **MIKE:** No, no, we don't do it that way, we don't go by hours, it's just by availability of yourself. You make yourself available for work and when your name comes up [gestures in a circle], you go to work or you don't.

[00:49:22] **HARVEY:** Right, right. What if you don't? What happens then?

[00:49:26] **MIKE:** Well, that's the beauty of working out of the hall, with the longshoremen, you go to work or you don't go to work. Course, if you don't go to work, you don't get paid, but you've got the freedom. To me, that's worth a couple of dollars an hour right there. [smiles] The fact that you can take your holidays and you can work for so many days in a row and then leave for a while, and come back. [shrugs] You know? You've got a lot of freedom, although they do certain amount of people, steady men—regular workforce of people—we call them. They choose to work on a site and that's where they go everyday. In our port, as far as I know, we have a rotation of jobs. That means at one time, when we brought it in—every job, you held it for a year and after a year, if anyone had more time than you, he could claim that job. As far as I know, we're the only local on the whole West Coast—United States and Canada—who have rotation. Now I understand that they've changed it a bit since I left, the tradespeople can stay a little longer. Maybe you can stay maybe two, three years, and then they're up for rotation. But as far as most people on the work site, the regular workforce sites, those jobs are rotated if not every year, then every couple years. You don't have the job for life.

[00:51:09] **HARVEY:** Ok. So those are what we would call steady men in the States. They're steady for a year or something.

[00:51:16] **MIKE:** They're steady there unless somebody with more time than them wants that job. If they have more time, they stay there. If no one else applies, they stay there. But if you apply, you have the qualifications, you got the job.

[00:51:32] **HARVEY:** When did that start?

[00:51:34] **MIKE:** You know, I couldn't tell you. We've must of had it now for—[sighs] I've been retired 15 years, so it's at least 20 years, if not more.

[00:51:49] **HARVEY:** Ok. So 1966, there was a big issue here over the Victoria Day holiday, do you remember that in 1966, the situation?

[00:52:09] **MIKE:** [nods]

[00:52:09] **HARVEY:** What did you do then? What was your involvement of that?

[00:52:17] **MIKE:** Well, I was still a casual.

[00:52:19] **HARVEY:** Oh, you were still a casual, ok.

[00:52:21] **MIKE:** But what happened was Canada declared, that there was to be eight statutory holidays if you

worked under the Federal Labor Act. I think it was eight statutory holidays. Well, the employers on the waterfront refused to pay it. They said, "It won't work, it won't work on the waterfront. We're not paying them." So what happened, the longshoremen took the position of, "If you're not going to pay us, we're not going to work." So I forget what holiday it was, that nobody showed up for work.

[00:53:15] **HARVEY:** Victoria Day.

[00:53:16] **MIKE:** Well, Victoria Day is when it came to a head, because the following holiday was Victoria Day.

[00:53:22] **HARVEY:** Good Friday, perhaps?

[00:53:25] **MIKE:** [shrugs] I can't remember. But when Victoria Day came, the employers got ahold of the union saying, "Are you going to make sure that we—" "No, we're not going to do that." So they got what is called an ex parte injunction. I don't know if they're used anymore, but I understand since then, they've stopped that practice. What it means is they could just, the employers could get ahold of a judge in the middle of the night and he would make a ruling, the union had no say.

So he ruled—he ordered that the presidents of all the locals to order their men to go to work. To post in every dispatch hall, telling the longshoremen, "Go to work." They refused, and so they [the judge] said, "Either you do this or you're going to be fined 400 dollars." Each president of the local, and the president of the Canadian area at that time would be fined 500 dollars. If not, three months in jail. So they refused to pay the fine, so they all went to jail.

Well, the problem was that the contract was supposed to expire and the employers didn't have anyone to negotiate with because they were all in jail! So the Minister of Labor at the time was very concerned that if a strike results because of this the grain would be tied up. The grain will not move and they're concerned about that because the boats on the prairies—the grain has to move. So the employers were stuck, they couldn't bargain because the leaders of the union were in jail and if the men were on strike, they were going to go. And so the Minister of Labor came out and he said, "I will amend this law that will require them to pay statutory holidays for longshoremen."

So the result was the B.C. Federation of Labor paid the 400 dollar fines, the men were released, and since then we have gotten our statutory holidays. There's only one of the presidents alive yet, Les Copan, who was president of 501 at that time, is around 88 years old now. He's the last one of them. There was nine of them that went to jail, I believe, and he is the last.

[00:56:20] **HARVEY:** As a youngster, what did you think of all that? Do you remember what you thought of all that? What was your impression?

[00:56:30] **MIKE:** Well, I supported it. I mean, after working on those ships as a seaman and being associated with those kind of people, yes, I was a union man as soon as I got in the union. After a year or so I ran for the executive [board]. I didn't make it the first time, but I did later, so I was on the executive quite a bit. So yes, I was involved with the union quite a bit.

[00:56:55] **HARVEY:** So you were active in it.

[00:56:56] **MIKE:** Yes, I was active in it.

[00:56:57] **HARVEY:** Pretty much right off. What offices did you hold? What offices did you try for?

[00:57:01] **MIKE:** I was vice president of the Local 500.

[00:57:07] **HARVEY:** When was that?

[00:57:08] **MIKE:** In the seventies. I don't know exactly. It was in the seventies, yes.

[00:57:15] **HARVEY:** Do you remember what major problems you had? What kind of beefs you had to settle? What difficulties occurred when you were vice president?

[00:57:23] **MIKE:** No, not really. I mean, we had some things come up, changes in contracts. Once you're involved and you start attending board meetings, and I was on the area board at the time, and contract negotiations, we'd be involved. We weren't speaking but we were there, they required us. I remember one time we were at an impasse and they said "We want all the board members to come to all the meetings." Off and on it took about a year. I thought it would end anyway. I was at the caucus and I was on the board at the time, I said, "I don't believe you really need us, that the board members have to be there for every meeting." And I remember the same Les Copan he got up and said, "Hey Mike, if you don't want to be at the board meetings, why don't you resign?" [smiles, shakes head] So, I went to the board meetings. We had controversy, a lot of controversy, but it was settled in house. You know, we fought and argued. Sometimes you think you're a popular guy and figure you can. . . All of a sudden the rank and file brings you back down to earth, when they tell you they don't like what you say. But you know, that's part of being involved. We kept it all in house.

I enjoyed being involved in the union, and with the Pensioners organization we have a good relationship with the active members. As a matter of fact, we have the regular board meetings of the active members. I'm a delegate there. We have two people allowed as Pensioners with a voice and no vote, and we have a Pensioners' trustee. There's four trustees from the company and the union—three or four each, plus a Pensioner. We have a voice and no vote.

Our Pensioner representative now is Barry Campbell, he attends all the board meetings, or all the trustees' meetings. He's allowed to speak, he's not allowed to vote. Him and I both attend the board meetings, and we're both allowed to speak. Voice, and no vote. While we [the Pensioners] are represented there by the two of us, we say what we want. They want us there and sometimes they don't like what we say [shrugs], but it works well.

We've got a great organization of younger guys that run this union now, and I often tell some of our guys, "They [ILWU officers] run the union, if they want our advice. . .but they are the people who run this union, like we did years ago." We're just here, and we're concerned about our pension issues, we speak up about them at the meetings, and we all respect each other.

[01:00:55] **HARVEY:** Do you remember anything about the 1971 Strike in the United States? Anything about that?

[01:00:59] **MIKE:** Yes, I had just got in the union in '71—

[01:01:02] **HARVEY:** I thought you got in in '64?

[01:01:02] **MIKE:** No, I started longshoring in January '64. I got in the union in '71. The United States, they were on strike for over 100 days, and it's hard for people to believe that the Vietnam War was on. So they moved military cargos in the United States, and they moved the grain. Everything else was tied up for over 100 days. It's unimaginable today, you know? Well, in those days there were very few containers. Containers hadn't really—[they] were not that big at that time—so it was mainly hand handling, standing gears on ships.

The position of the union was, "What do we do up here?" Because we have a lot of cargo coming through our

ports all the time, at times we can hardly handle it, and all of a sudden they go on strike in the United States. Well then all these ships want to use our ports. So what are we going to do? [shrugs] Harry Bridges—I think I’ve still got that copy of The Dispatcher [ILWU newsletter] where he told us, ‘Just go ahead and work. Your ships, our ships. Because the amount of work that you could do on ships that would normally come to our ports. doesn’t mean a thing in our strike. Because you won’t be able to handle that much. The ports will be clogged.’ And they were. It was crazy. [Mike smiles, Harvey chuckles]

I have to laugh, it puts me to mind of one guy. In those days we had straight time during daytime, and time and a half in the afternoon, and double time on the graveyard shift. This one guy, “Mike,” he said, “I can’t believe it. I worked 72 graveyard shifts in a row. 72 graveyard shifts in a row.” He said, “I got up every day and I sang ‘God Bless America.’” [laughs] The money was just—it was just too much work for us to handle, but that’s a fact [laughs] They just kept working and working and working, but like Harry said, “It would make no difference at all, to our strike.”

[01:03:54] **HARVEY:** One thing I think, I’m not sure we got, that you might have an angle on, and that is the 1958 strike. I know it was before you came in to the waterfront, but it had—

[01:04:07] **MIKE:** Well, the ‘58 strike—because I’ve looked through this a lot, I’ve read a lot—was when the pension plan was really—the jointly controlled pension plan was established. Prior to that the pension plan was completely controlled by the employers, the union had no access to anything. They didn’t know how the plan was invested, or how much they had. It was strictly a company plan.

So they went on strike in ‘58 and well, they won the strike. But the employers refused—it took four years. Finally the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on it and they ruled that part of the money—part of the problem was the money in the old plan. The employers didn’t want to use that to bring the people up to parity, the people who had been retired prior to ’58. The union said these people have to be brought up to parity. It took four years until the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favor [of the union] and a certain amount of that money was used to bring these pre-’58 people up to parity.

[01:05:50] **HARVEY:** It’s my impression that it was something of a turning point because it was a victory in the field, if you want to look at it that way, that it had been unable to be achieved in ‘35. But is this kind of a turning point in confidence—

[01:06:06] **MIKE:** I think it was because prior to that the union had no say in what the pension was, in how it was operated, Now we have joint control of the plan. They have actuaries that take care of the plan and recommend certain changes based on the policies the union adopts. It was a turning point in control of the waterfront. We would have some control down there. It’s worked very well.

[01:06:47] **HARVEY:** What other big issues have I missed that you would like to bring up, or you might think of?

[01:06:56] **MIKE:** As I say, I’ve been retired fifteen years now.

[01:07:01] **HARVEY:** What offices have you held in the Pensioners’? You’ve held some offices in the Pensioners’?

[01:07:08] **MIKE:** [nods] I’m the president of the Pensioners’ Club here in Vancouver. We don’t have an executive board, we just have a president, a vice president, and a secretary. I’ve been the president of the Pensioners’ for eight or nine years now.

[01:07:24] **HARVEY:** Were you ever involved in other politics outside of the union?

[01:07:28] **MIKE:** No, no, not really. I was a member of the NDP, the New Democratic Party here. It's a labour party here in Canada, but I'm not active in it, no.

[01:07:48] **HARVEY:** [aside] Conor, do you have any questions? I don't mean to put you on the spot, but we have a captive here. [laughter from Mike]

[01:08:03] **CONOR:** Could you talk a little bit about your impression of how the mergers of the different locals went? I know you touched on that a little bit, but I'm curious what the experience was like for all the different locals to come together.

[01:08:16] **MIKE:** I think the fact that prior to the merger, all the locals having separate contracts, different rates, different working conditions, different pensions. You know the main thing was to try to get a pension plan that included everyone, that covered all waterfront employees. That was the biggest thing. Some of the members might have thought, "We've lost a certain amount of autonomy," this and that. But you know when you merge with a different group, it's not going to be all one way. The benefits being that we have one master contract, one pension plan. For a while there was two contracts, just after the merger, I think, there was a separate book for the warehouse contract and a separate book for the deep sea contract, but that's gone now, that's all one with the same rates of pay in any part of the industry.

It's been a great thing, because if you take coastwise, it's not—years ago there wasn't much coastwise cruise ships. Well now the cruise ships are huge, but it's only for a few months of the year. Grain lining, that's done with. They used to grain line, prepare these old Liberty ships for grain, and there's all kinds of work to be done—those ships are finished now. They wouldn't be working. Most of the people in these separate smaller locals wouldn't be working because the work has changed completely, so it's helped them all—it's helped all of us.

[01:10:24] **CONOR:** And I do have one other question, one of the things that often hops to the front when we're recounting the U.S. experience of the ILWU is the solidarity actions they often engage in. Do you remember any solidarity actions relating to international type events? Sort of like anti-apartheid? Or any of those kinds of things? Was the ILWU up here involved in any of that?

[01:10:47] **MIKE:** Yes, I remember loading ships, actually Soviet ships at the time, we'd load containers. They'd send aid to countries in Latin America, I can't remember exactly what it was. As a matter of fact, [during] the Nicaraguan civil war there, one of the ports there, San Juan del Sur on the West Coast. They have a fishing industry there, and there was a lot of destruction there during the war. So unions across Canada, led by the fishermen's union, they organized a project to build a ship, build a fishing boat, and supply it to Nicaragua, to the port of San Juan del Sur, a cooperative down there. Unions all across Canada donated to it. It was loaded on the deck after it was built, it was loaded on the deck of a ship here in Vancouver. They asked us, "Would any of you guys come down and volunteer your labor?" I went down with a few guys and we loaded that fishing boat on the deck of the ship. We loaded and it sailed. Some of the guys who were loading it, they were going down there to unload it in Costa Rica and then load it onto a truck and bring it up into Nicaragua.

We all went for a beer after we loaded it and they said, "Hey Mike, why don't you come down there with us?" I said "No." And they were trying to talk me into going down there. I went home, and my kids were grown, my wife had passed away many years ago. Anyway, I said "I was just down there and we loaded this ship." And they [Mike's kids] said, "Dad, why don't you go?" I said, "I don't know." Then the phone rang, these guys were still in the pub and they said, "Mike, why don't you come down?" And they said [the kids], "Go ahead!" So we flew down to Costa Rica, we met the ship when it came in. The deal was, we wanted it on the dock. They said, "No

we can't put it on the dock, we're putting it in the water." So—pardon me—we put it on the dock. Well, once we got it on the dock to take it up there on a truck, they found out the ship was too high to go under the overpasses, so they said, "We have to put this ship in the water, and you have to sail it up there."

Well, we had loaded a container with gear that was with the ship, life jackets, everything, well the container went up to Nicaragua. The boat was on the dock, and it took us so long to try and get that—they said, "Oh we can't do this, we can't do that." Finally, a ship came in and we went aboard and we asked the captain, if 'you could put this boat in the water for us.' So they did. Then we had to put the mast. I went up on the crane and the guys hooked up the mast. We put mast into the boat and we got it alongside the dock, and then—we didn't have any charts or anything to go up there. The guy that was running the project, he was a fisherman by the name of Al Browner. A real solid guy, he'd been running fish boats for years here on the coast. So he got ahold of a few charts, but he didn't have any calipers. He had a packet—he was a smoker, used to smoke like a fiend—he used a packet of cigarettes to measure on the charts for us. [mimes measuring]

So we sailed it up there and it was donated to the fisherman's co-op in San Juan del Sur. It was a great experience. We were met by their people there, there was a delegation came down from Canada. They met us and thanked us very much. It was a great experience.

We'd load containers the odd times if there were ships, we'd just load them and not be paid, we'd just do it. I guess, we've done what we can to help working people everywhere, whatever we can do. Donated to different causes.

[01:16:48] **HARVEY:** Any reflection of the American-side Civil Rights Movement up here that the longshoremen got involved in? For example, the Local 10 used to march with the civil rights movement actions in San Francisco, they did a lot of that at one time, in the sixties.

[01:17:04] **MIKE:** Not really up here. We didn't have that much of a problem with that, I mean. [pauses] I guess the United States, they have a different history than we do. We've never had it that bad. Now you go to the East Coast of Canada, there's a larger Black population. At times, they've had problems with the same things that were going on in the South of the United States. But out here we haven't had, that I . . .

[01:17:40] **HARVEY:** How about with the original peoples? With Native Canadian peoples? Any movement they ever had that you guys got involved with?

[01:17:49] **MIKE:** Not enough, really if you think about it. I guess it's the same with aboriginal people all over the world. Once they're colonized, they get blamed for what the colonizers have done to them. It's all their fault. I was talking to a couple of guys from Australia here, and they talked about the same thing. They have the same problems there. Same problems all over the world. You go colonize, subject these people to certain things and the fact that there's problems later, it's all their fault. [shrugs]

Some people can't accept that. They figure 'we're here and it doesn't matter who you, who were here before us.' My mother used to say—she's an Italian woman—that "Columbus discovered America," and I said, well, "He discovered that there were already people living here." [laughs] But they're very nationalistic people [Italians]. In the United States even more so. There's a huge Italian population in the United States, so they still have their Columbus Day marches in New York and all this kind of thing.

[01:19:17] **HARVEY:** Anything else you want to add? Looking back, you know? Maybe a nice sweeping statement looking back over the whole—

[01:19:24] **MIKE:** Well, I'll tell you, I've been blessed. I mean I've done everything I've wanted to do. I've always enjoyed working on ships. I worked on some seine boats in the fishing industry for a few summers and I

remember I spoke to you before about it—people going on strike, and what do you do when there's scabbing going on?

I remember one year, 1953 maybe, the fishermen went on strike and some fishermen went to work, you know, they went out there. After the strike was over and they had this fairly large group of people who had gone to work, they scabbed, and they said, "Well, what are we going to do with these people?" The end result was they took them back in the union. You know, a lot people thought, "Well, why would you do that?" They said, "The last thing we want is those people out and then organizing into another union. Then we have two unions here." Sometimes you have to bite the bullet and keep your jurisdiction, because there's nothing more important than that. For a lot of people, that's a hard sell. They figured, 'to hell with them, they scabbed.' But, the bottom line is the jurisdiction.

[01:20:50] **HARVEY:** Takes a broad view.

[01:20:52] **MIKE:** You have to if you want to be here, because you never know. I mean, the East Coast of the States and on the East Coast of Canada too, for that matter, but especially in the States with the ILA [International Longshoremen's Association] . I was reading articles, they have an ILA contract and they have an ILA late contract, just to keep control of their work. They have to fight Teamsters in some ports, non-union docks in some ports. The whole West Coast, all the major ports, we [ILWU] do the work from Alaska to Mexico, we do the work. There's nothing more important than that. So it's been a great ride, I tell you. It's been great being a seaman, being a fisherman, being a longshoreman, and being a pensioner. Especially being an ILWU pensioner. [laughs]

[01:21:50] **HARVEY:** That's great. Thank you very much.

[01:21:54] **MIKE:** You're welcome.

[01:21:55] **HARVEY:** It's much appreciated

[01:21:56] **MIKE:** You're very welcome

[01:21:58] **HARVEY:** We appreciate your evening. You've put a lot of effort into